


TEN PRINCIPLES FOR ENERGY DEMOCRACY

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the CJA Energy Democracy Working Group

This framework for Energy Democracy promotes an agenda that incorporates both immediate and longer-term strategies that serve as a guide toward achieving the vision of a true Energy Democracy. These strategies must be designed around several fundamental principles of democracy:

- 1. Human Rights:** The United Nations has declared that the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable *environment* is integral to the full enjoyment of a wide range of *human rights*, including the rights to life, health, food, water.¹ In alignment with human rights principles, Energy Democracy must be built on the practice and understanding of the main dimensions of the interrelationship between human rights and environmental protection, namely as outlined by the United Nations:
 - The environment is a requirement for the enjoyment of human rights. Therefore, full and equal environmental protection is necessary to allow the full exercise of protected rights;
 - Certain human rights, especially access to information, participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters, is essential to good environmental decision-making;
 - The right to a safe, healthy and ecologically-balanced environment is a human right in itself.
- 2. Self-determination:** Self-determination is the rights of peoples to determine their own destiny, including their own form of economic, cultural and social development. Energy is a vital and basic need in our daily lives. How we produce and consume energy impacts communities and nature and their rights to a clean, healthy and viable life. Therefore, a principle of Energy Democracy is that all peoples and communities have the right and ability to participate in, and make decisions about their energy system. The shift to Energy Democracy requires building new forms of decision-making and governance over energy choices in a way that supports self-determination, most especially for those communities and environments that are most vulnerable to energy system impacts.

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- 3. Energy is a Commons:** Energy is essentially the transformation of nature for our use. Whether it is fossil fuels such as coal and oil, or renewable sources such as the sun's energy – we are using nature for our needs. A fundamental principle of Energy Democracy is that these gifts of nature are for everyone, and as such are everyone's responsibility to care for, nurture and sustain. The resources used for energy are part of the Earth's commons, and should not be owned by, or belong to, any set of peoples, countries or corporations exclusively. The energy commons is a recognition and respect for the cultural, spiritual, and social elements of the Earth, and is an acknowledgement that its natural process should not be exploited and exhausted.
 - 4. Meaningful Work:** Energy Democracy must promote open access to decent jobs and work – that is, jobs that provide safe and healthy livelihoods for families and communities; fair and equitable treatment of workers; financial security and adequate financial protections; health benefits; the right to be treated with dignity and respect; and the ability to voice concerns and participate in decision-making about working conditions, free from harassment. Energy Democracy creates new, meaningful, living wage jobs that prioritize unemployed and underemployed community members, community members left out of the fossil-fuel economy, and workers in the fossil fuel industry that will be transitioned out of the extractive economy. Energy Democracy supports opportunities for thinking about and creating new organizational forms, such as worker cooperatives, worker-owned businesses and other innovative worker-supported models. In the long term, we will need a Just Transition to build a regenerative economy with meaningful work in which people have control over their own labor.
 - 5. Energy Use:** Energy is a means to meet our society's needs for various daily activities. We need energy to cook; heat, light and cool our homes and businesses; power our industry; and fuel our transportation system. The transition to an Energy Democracy is also a shift in our understanding and relationship to energy toward one in which we build our communities in a way that minimizes our need for using nature's resources. This means building our housing, transportation and other infrastructures so that we can fulfill our daily life needs without a large system of producing energy for profit. This requires a shift in our understanding about how energy should be used. It is also a fundamental principle of Energy Democracy that all peoples have access to decent livelihoods.

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- 6. Community Governance:** A key step toward Energy Democracy is regaining community and public control over the energy system. This is a longer-term project, which will require overhauling the corporatist energy regime that is in place today. As we move toward Energy Democracy, we will need to develop and implement strategies that will strategically and deliberately move us toward our vision of community governance. This will require us to develop new forms of governance, including laws, policies and programs that enable, empower and support democratic decision-making in its truest form. This includes an obligation and responsibility to ensure that communities can define the architecture of their energy system, and any and all strategies for community forms of ownership of energy services and local assets.
 - 7. Diversity and Scale.** The shift to Energy Democracy will require that the design and technologies of the energy system will be determined by the goals and needs of the community. Decision making over the type and quality of energy services; how energy is produced and delivered; ensuring access to energy services for all; and other key issues should be based on the community. This means that a diversity of energy mechanisms that can meet the diversity of community needs will be essential. A democratic energy system that matches the scale of energy production to the needs of community use is more efficient, flexible, and democratic. This type of energy system also reduces waste, inefficiencies and the need for very high capital investment and maintenance required by the large-scale, centralized energy system now in place.
 - 8. Reclaiming Relationship:** A core problem of the extractive energy economy is that our relationship to energy, as people and communities, is that of a consumer. Energy Democracy is a shift away from this consumerist relationship to one where people and communities define and shape their relationship to how the Earth is used for our energy. Reclaiming our relationship to nature as more than managers of energy projects -- it is to empower community members to define how we wish to be in relationship to nature.
 - 9. Acknowledge, Act and Repair Historical Harms:** The development of the fuel-fuel energy system has left a legacy of social, economic and environmental harms across many communities. The history of the extractive economy cannot be divorced from the history of race, class and the colonization of Indigenous peoples in this country. Energy Democracy requires that these historical legacies, which continue to have impacts on Indigenous, communities of color, and other exploited peoples be recognized and that the costs for repairing these harms be acknowledged and integrated into the development of our energy future.

10. Rights of Nature: As outlined by the Laws of Mother Earth developed in Bolivia²: Mother Earth is a dynamic living system comprising an indivisible community of all living systems and living organisms, interrelated, interdependent and complementary, which share a common destiny. Mother Earth has the right to the integrity of all living systems, including the conditions for regeneration. This includes the rights to:

- *life*: the integrity of living systems and natural processes that sustain them, and capacities and conditions for regeneration; as well as the preservation of differentiation and variety of beings without being genetically altered or structurally modified in an artificial way, so that their existence, functioning or future potential is threatened;
- *water*: preservation of the functionality of the water cycle, its existence in the quantity and quality needed to sustain living systems, and its protection from pollution for the reproduction of the life of Mother Earth and all its components;
- *air*: preservation of the quality and composition of air for sustaining living systems and its protection from pollution, for the reproduction of all life;
- *equilibrium*: maintenance or restoration of the interrelationship, interdependence, complementarity and functionality of the components of Mother Earth in a balanced way for the continuation of their cycles and reproduction of their vital processes;
- *restoration*: timely and effective restoration of living systems affected by human activities directly or indirectly;
- *pollution-free living*: preservation of any of Mother Earth's components from contamination, as well as toxic and radioactive waste generated by human activities.

ENDNOTES

1. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), High-level Expert Meeting: The New Future of Human Rights and Environment, December 2009. Accessed at: www.unep.org/environmentalgovernance/Events/HumanRightsandEnvironment/tabid/2046
2. Drawn directly from the Laws of Mother Earth, Bolivia. Full text: <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/Projects/Indicators/motherearthbolivia.html>